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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Subjective Theory of Beauty in Ashraf Maftoon's Poetry

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ABSTRACT

It is necessary to explore the subjective beauty theory in Ashraf Maftoon's poetry since he is considered the founder of this theory in the poetry of the Pashto language. Moreover, he is well-thought-out to be a unique poet with his ideas. Although he has made a lot of contributions in this subject, his work is not widely researched, and his poetic work is not adequately analyzed and critiqued. However, he is one of the most influential poets in modern Pashto poetry. This paper aimed to provide the first gateway for analyzing and explaining the aesthetic theory in Ashraf Maftoon's poetry. This study, within the context of modern aesthetic theory, was conducted using a library-based research method and was based on an analytical approach. This study concluded that Maftoon put beauty in human beings and in his/her senses and hence explained it in terms of human feelings. In addition to Jamal (beauty), he believed in the importance of Jalal (majesty or sublimity). Moreover, he was a proponent of the distinctive subjective theory.

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Introduction

According to Ashraf Maftoon, in modern Pashto literature, he was an intellectual and independent poet who did not allow others to dissent. In the sphere of intellectual freedom, there were no limits and constraints imposed by morals and society in his writings. He expressed whatever he wanted to say in his poems without being bound by anything. The poets were highly passionate about beauty and nature. In their poems, the connection between love seemed to be strong and lasting. In their poetry, they elegantly depicted nature and the cosmos, as well as passion.

He was also a poet of great affection towards beauty and aesthetics. In this regard, he is regarded as a subjectivist theorist. There are two famous schools of thought in aesthetics. One group regards beauty as a mental quality, while the second regards it as objective or external.

In Maftoon's subjectivist approach, an object is neither good-looking nor ugly on its own. On the contrary, the mental condition or subjective feeling is what makes an object good-looking for one person and ugly for another. From Maftoon's point of view, there is nothing in the nature of objects that can be called beauty or ugliness. This means that objects have no intrinsic beauty, since beauty does not exist outside. Rather, it is someone's mental state or personal sense of beauty or ugliness that shapes an impression of the beauty of things.

Problem Statement

Although Ashraf Maftoon is known in modern Pashto poetry as a poet of beauty and also an advocate of a specific beauty theory, the beauty theory of Maftoon has not been explored in a systematic way by researchers interested in Pashto language and literature. Therefore, fans and admirers of Maftoon find it difficult to analyze and evaluate his intellectual identity and theory of beauty.

The current research seeks to contribute to solving these problems by explaining the subjectivist theory of beauty in Maftoon's poems.

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Importance of the Topic

The subjectivism theory of beauty, as seen in the poetry of Ashraf Maftoon, is a serious area of study and hence should be thoroughly studied. The importance of studying this theory stems from the fact that fans of the poet find it difficult to comprehend his artistic philosophy.

By undertaking such a study, we will gain a better understanding of Maftoon's thoughts and insights. In addition, this will provide a means of discussing Maftoon's poetry and an opportunity to compare subjectivist and objectivist theories.

Research Objectives

- To examine the results obtained from studying Ashraf Maftoon's intellectual individuality;
- To analyze the aesthetic visions of Ashraf Maftoon;
- To apply Maftoon's subjectivist theory in view of other contemporary theories of aesthetics.

Research Questions

- How does the theory of subjectivity manifest itself in Ashraf Maftoon's poetry?
- How well have Maftoon's aesthetic visions been studied?
- What should be done about the applied part of Maftoon's subjectivist theory?

Literature Review

There have been references in modern literary history to the poet Ashraf Maftoon, including biographical information and his poetry. Nonetheless, the aforementioned sources offer a general discussion of aspects of his poetry without taking into account his aesthetic and poetic vision.

For examples, Khalil (2014 a) in his collection of essays entitled Pakhtana Likwal, refers to Maftoon and presents a few samples from his poetry, yet without addressing his aesthetics in terms of beauty.

Khalil (2021 b), in his book Aainey, analyzes several aspects of Maftoon's poetry, including his romanticism, philosophy, and subjectivism. Nevertheless, he refers only briefly to the concepts mentioned, providing a few examples, and offering no thorough analysis. Mafton's concept of beauty is totally subjective. He considers beauty to be within a person, and, according to his senses, the value of beauty in human feelings is determined; hence, the standard of beauty is within a person. Great scholars of aesthetics have explained this theory, and Maftoon is also a Shidaee.

Ali (2020), in his dissertation entitled A Critical Study of the Poetry of Ashraf Khan Maftoon, has written an introduction to Maftoon's personality and analyzed various aspects of his poetry. Moreover, he elaborates on the concept of romanticism in his poetry and analyzes its rebellious and philosophical aspects. Yet he says nothing about his subjectivism.

Research Methodology

In studying the subjectivism of beauty in Ashraf Maftoon's poetry, the present study draws on various books and articles in aesthetics, as well as those concerned with Maftoon's poems. Certain verses by Maftoon, where he defines beauty, are chosen, examined, and analyzed.

Findings

Maftoon is a poet with a unique style and thought in Pashto poetry, who holds a special place among the pioneers of romantic poetry in Pashto literature. His real name was Ashraf Khan, and he used to call himself Maftoon. His father's name was Qalandar Khan. He was born in Kanaankhel, a village in the Razor district of Ashinghar, in 1924 (Ali, 2020).

In general, Ashraf Maftoon was a romantic poet who followed Western philosophy, advocating rebellion against national traditions and cultural values. He was neither the heir of anyone's thoughts in Pashto poetry, nor did he have any ideological friends or poetic successors. He was unparalleled in his thoughts and art; he was unique and alone. He was an unparalleled poet and, despite dissenting opinions, he was without vision and without hypocrisy. Such personalities are very rare in history and appear after centuries (Raz, 2023).

Though Maftoon's poetry is influenced by the imagination of English-language poets, he has still colored his poems with the pure Pashtun environment and the original color of the Pashto language. He used the pure, simple, and beautiful rural words and phrases of Pashto language. He does not consider poetry an object of force; rather, he considers it an object of impression, and for poetry, he wants an impression that moves the heart, mind, and soul and throws it into the ocean of subconsciousness. To move the heart, reason, and soul, Effect is needed in words and colors, and rhythm.

چـــي زړه، دلـــيـــل او روح دي وبـــورنـــوي
په لفظ او رنـــگ و تـــرنـــگ کـــې تـــاثـــيـــر پـــکـــار دی
(Maftoon, 2025, p. 163)

Jahani, (2009) states, "Ashraf Maftoon's poetry is the voice of an awakened conscience. He has left no issue in the realm of poetry. He has answered every question that came to his heart with much care and love" (p. 258).

Each poet and writer has their own unique idea and imagination in the field of beauty and aesthetics. They have presented these ideas and imaginations according to the theories of internality and externality, or in other words, subjectivity and objectivity. If we look at Pashto poetry, we will find many of our poets and writers presenting their views on beauty in both poetry and prose, including the poet Ashraf Maftoon, an admirer of beauty.

The theory of beauty as subjective holds that beauty does not exist independently but is in the eyes of an artist, maker, and observer, and depends on their mental strength or psychological state. A thing itself is neither beautiful nor ugly. Beauty and ugliness have meaning for the person who has experienced both and gained aesthetic experience.

Ashraf Maftoon, who has a subjective theory and imagination in the field of beauty. He views beauty and virtue according to this theory. He considers beauty and virtue to be within the human being and in his senses. He has presented and cultivated aesthetic concepts and theories in his poems in an individual style and color. But before we examine this theme in Maftoon's Poetry, let us first briefly discuss beauty and the theory of subjectivity.

Beauty:

Regarding the definition of beauty, scholars have expressed their understanding and definitions in each era according to their own thoughts and opinions, seeking to present a complete definition of beauty to lovers. But most aesthetic scholars and scholars think that it is not possible to present a comprehensive and complete definition of beauty and beauty, as Walter Peter says in this regard:

A comprehensive definition of beauty is not possible, as beauty is the name of an individual quality that cannot be generalized (Khattak, 1987).

"There is no definition of beauty that can be universally accepted" (Khattak, 1987, p. 34).

There are many levels and degrees of beauty, but the essence is absolute beauty, which we cannot see or imagine, because individual beauty is subject to change and destruction, but divine beauty is eternal. Beauty is recognized by the fact that it brings aesthetic pleasure and happiness, but still, in art and literature, in the universe, and in man, the ancient qualities of beauty, namely unity, proportion, and harmony, can be considered essential elements, without which beauty cannot exist. There can be no comprehensive definition of human beauty, because beauty changes a hundred colors that neither reason nor philosophy can encompass. After all, a generous woman may become a beauty to a person, but reason cannot answer this (Khattak, 2021).

Goodness is a broad value, and beauty is a relatively limited value, but in general, no distinction is maintained in the use of these two words, and most of them are considered synonymous, and the main reason for this is the word aesthetics. The word aesthetics is derived from the word beauty, but in fact, in aesthetics, not only beauty is discussed, but in addition to art, beauty and other values related to it are also discussed, which on the one hand, beauty, delicacy, charm, charm and beauty are discussed, but on the other hand, glory, greatness, dignity, strength and humor are also discussed and discussed. Also, on the contrary, qualities such as ugliness, shamelessness, and so on are studied, which are part of aesthetics. So this is why the word "beauty" is used in a broader sense, referring to aesthetics, rather than in its proper sense. There is no doubt that beauty is beauty, but beauty is not just beauty; it is also glory.

Mafton says about aesthetics and Refulgence:

بې جلاله بې جمـــالـــه که خـــوبـــي وي هم خـــامـــي شـــي
چې جلال او جمال راشي کـــه خـــامـــي وي هـــم خـــوبـــي شـــي
(Maftoon, 1981, p. 192)

Aesthetics is a continuous spiritual practice that gives beauty to all aspects of life. Without aesthetics, life has no meaning. We see that on the one hand, nature reflects beauty, beautiful flowers, beautiful landscapes, waterfalls, beautiful birds, animals, and trees look beautiful to us; on the other hand, we also see beauty in the way people sit and stand. There is beauty in our speech. There is beauty in eating food. There is beauty in sound. There is beauty in walking. Even in the way we live. Whatever looks good to us, whatever action we consider good, and whatever feeling brings us peace is beauty. Therefore, life is based on aesthetics, and aesthetics is the essence of life. Life has no meaning without it.

Objective Theory

Two theories of beauty are very popular: Objectivity and Subjectivity. One group of scholars calls beauty objective, and the other subjective. By objectivity,

the meaning is those qualities and characteristics that exist outside the human mind and are objective, i.e., they can be perceived by the five senses, and in this, the balance, proportion, and harmony are important because the presence of these qualities causes the beauty of a thing. They consider it to be an absolute attribute of things; therefore, it does not need the heart for its existence.

The subjective theory of beauty is more in vogue. According to this theory, beauty is not a thing outside. It is the name of the subjective quality of man; it is therefore an inner and psychological thing which takes on an external form or form in accordance with the expression of passion and desire.

There is nothing beautiful or ugly in the universe; it is only the subjective qualities of man that make something beautiful or ugly. I warn you that I do not want to attribute beauty or ugliness to nature, nor to order or disorder. Things can be considered beautiful or ugly, orderly or disorderly, by our imagination (Khatak, 1987).

Subjectivity, interiority - in literature, subjective attitude, subjective way of acting, subjective way of observing, subjective way of thinking, and subjective imagery, etc., can be called subjectivity. It means that the material the poet or writer presents is entirely shaped by their essence, emotions, beliefs, and theories (Khatak, 2021).

The theorists of beauty say that beauty is inner or psychological and takes an external form as an expression of passion and desire. That is to say, the other name for the perfect expression of emotions is perfection, and when perfection takes an external form, it is called beauty. Instinct considers sex to be the main source of beauty and attractiveness. Because of its expression, this universe is beautiful, but nothing is either beautiful or ugly (Yousafzai, 2016).

According to the subjective theory of beauty, no object or thing is inherently beautiful or ugly; rather, it is the mental quality or subjective impression of the observer that makes one thing attractive and another ugly. One person may find one thing attractive and another not. Similarly, one person may like one color and another. So the result is that beauty itself is not a fixed and determined value. Objects themselves are not beautiful because beauty does not exist externally. It is each person's own mental quality, individual tendency, or some special impression that makes things beautiful or ugly.

As stated above, the subjective theory holds that an object is neither beautiful nor ugly, nor pleasant nor disgusting. About this, Ashraf Maftoon opines as follows:

حســـــــن ســـــــتـــــا د زړه احســـــــاس دی
هســـــي بـــــل تـــــه حســـــــيـــــن وايـــــي

(Maftoon, 1981, p. 437)

Mafton considers the colors and sorrows of this world to be in the heart of a person and their emotions. He says that if a person's heart is alive, has emotions and feelings, then this world is beautiful and colorful for him; on the contrary, if his heart is intoxicated, dead to emotions, then this world is sad and ugly for him.

که په زړه مســت يې جهان رنګيـــن دی
که زړه دې مړ وي جهان غمګـــن دی
دارو مدار يې ســتـــا په جذبـــات دی
نه دا غمګين دی نه دا رنګـــيـــن دی

(Maftoon, 2025, p. 221)

Nothing is beautiful or ugly in this universe; it is the subjective estimate of man that makes anything beautiful or ugly. Everything can be called beautiful or ugly, orderly or disorderly by the imagination. This fact has been shortly put by Spinoza, which is narrated in a verse by Maftoon Sahib:

نه دا پـــه ســـکـــنـــه وي، نـــه دا پـــه ســـپـــيـــنـــه وي
مـــيـــنـــه، چـــې مـــيـــنـــه وي، تـــوره حســـــيـــنـــه وي

(Maftoon, 1981, p. 284)

Beauty is not a property in things themselves; it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them. Since each mind perceives a different beauty, one man can consider something ugly while another man finds it beautiful. It thus becomes binding upon every man to yield to his own feelings without pretending to regulate those of others. The search for true beauty and true ugliness is as futile a thing as the pretension to determine true sweetness and true bitterness.

محبت ګورئ د زړونـو څه پـــه تـــور او پـــه ســـپـــيـــن نـــه دی
بس هغه بنده بنـايسـتـه وي کـوم چـې زړه تـه د چـا ګـران شـــي

(Maftoon, 1981, p. 214)

The beloved, you view beauty and virtue from the standpoint of love. For him, everything that induces love and affection is beautiful and virtuous. As much as the center of love and affection is the heart, and this impression is born from the heart, on this basis, the

subjectivity or interiority of beauty is also referred to in this verse:

مینه کې هر یو شی حسین ښکاري
هر څه کې مخ د ماهجبین ښکاري

(Maftoon, 2025, p. 163)

Or the following verse:

دا و کمال د مینې، چې لا فاني شو حسن
که قیس مئین نه وی، لیلی به چا پېژندی

(Maftoon, 2025, p. 214)

A thing is neither beautiful nor ugly in itself; the bearer of the beauty and ugliness is the observer who experiences the aesthetic of these things. Beauty is in the mind that perceives it and in the eyes that see it. Maftoon says about this:

حسن د جانان زما لیمو کې دے
یا که دا د ناز ادا کتو کې دے
زهٔ ئې لتوم خو چرته نه ښکاري
شوه را نه پټ شوے په کمځو کې دے

(Maftoon, 1981, p. 495)

Maftoon's thematic theory and concept of beauty are further explained and elaborated in the following verses.

احاس چې زړه کې نه وي حسن نه وي لیلی نه وي
ړندو سترګو د پاره، سپورمی نه وي رڼا نه وي

(Maftoon, 2025, p. 210)

حسن مې د روح او د احساس د ستر ګو سود دی
وړی زه د حسن، که سپورمی که بوډی تال دی

(Maftoon, 1981, p. 335)

ستر ګو کې حسن، زړه کې ارمان شي
احساس د مینې ښکلی جانان شي

(Maftoon, 2025, p. 697)

Conclusion

Through studying the subjectivist theory of beauty in the poetry of Ashraf Maftoon, it can be said that he has been very successful in conveying his thoughts (فکر) and conceptual vision (تصور). Through artistic and refined language, he has articulated a subjective approach to beauty and aesthetics. In Maftoon's view, not only beauty (جمال), but also sublimity or majesty (جلال) are necessary elements of beauty, and it is not only through beauty (جمال) that beauty is defined, but also it is essential to consider sublimity or majesty (جلال) in this process. Maftoon offers arguments and examples to support his subjectivist approach to beauty, in opposition to the objectivist school of thought. He has developed some interesting and rich topics for discussion based on his subjectivist theory of beauty, which helps us understand his approach from the perspective of contemporary aesthetic theories. This study not only enables us to assess his aesthetic model but also guides us through analyzing other poets' works concerning similar issues.

Recommendations

- The poets in the Pashto language have varied perceptions regarding beauty and aesthetics; thus, there is a need for more research in this field for the sake of producing important information for the readers.
- The scholars and lovers of Pashto poetry should examine the poetry of several poets in connection with subjectivism and objectivism.
- Ashraf Maftoon's poetry is characterized by numerous qualities and aspects, hence the need for more research to uncover these aspects before the readers.

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